

JOHN ANDERSON

MINISTER OF DUMBARTON AND OF THE RAMSHORN KIRK, GLASGOW: 1698—1721

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I

SOME time ago Mr. A. Whitford Anderson of Gerrard's Cross, Buckinghamshire, a lineal descendant of John Anderson, sent to the General Assembly's Library a volume of typed extracts from papers his ancestor had left. The Manuscripts had been contained in "a painted chest with three locks," and had been bequeathed by John Anderson to his eldest son James, who was afterwards minister of Rosneath. He in turn left them to his eldest son, John Anderson (1726-1796), who became Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Glasgow, and was the founder of the well-known Andersonian College in that city. The Professor, being unmarried, bequeathed the chest to his brother Andrew, from whom it has descended to Mr. Whitford Anderson.

Mr. Whitford Anderson has been at pains to go through the whole collection of manuscripts, consisting of diary, letters, sermons, records of cases before the Church courts in which the minister of Dumbarton was involved, and other documents; and has made a selection of those which he considered most interesting and informative, and has had typed copies of them prepared. This has been indeed a labour of love and Mr. Anderson deserves much gratitude for his painstaking toil. It is to these extracts that the first half of this paper is almost wholly due, and I make acknowledgment of my debt to Mr. Anderson.

II

John Anderson was born in Edinburgh in 1670, where he was educated at the University, taking his Master of Arts degree in 1688, the year of the Revolution. His father, according to a family tradition, had been evicted from a small property in Morayshire for non-conformity to Episcopacy, and had settled near Edinburgh and tried to make a living by farming. After taking his degree, John, who was evidently no mean scholar, became tutor to John, Duke of Argyll and Greenwich—the Duke who is familiar

to us through his appearances in Scott's *Heart of Midlothian* and Neil Munro's *The New Road*. Thereafter he was for a time one of the masters, or "doctors" as they were called, in the Canongate School, from which he passed in 1693 to the Headmastership of Leith Grammar School. Two years later he was appointed by the Lord Provost, Bailies, and Councillors of Edinburgh to be one of the Doctors of the High School at the salary of £100 (Scots) *per annum*.

While at Leith he married Agnes Moffat, who survived him by some fifteen years. The marriage does not seem to have been an altogether ideally happy one, for he remarks in a paper which he calls "Some Observes of my Life"—"My marriage has indeed been a sea of troubles to me, yet sweetened in severall things by which I have hitherto made myself as easy under it as possible."

Anderson seems to have borne a charmed life in his younger years. In these "Observes of my Life" he narrates some hairbreadth escapes:—"I observe that of all dangers, I have been most frequently exposed to shooting, having frequently escaped very narrowly. In the year 1689, when the Duke of Gordon held out the Castle of Edinburgh for King James, my curiosity led me to get view of the trenches of the besiegers at the Castle. I resolved to be as wary in doing it as I could, and therefore stole out alone in the middle of three ways at the end of the West Port and there to peep over a low wall into the trenches; but before I came to the spot whence I resolved to take my view, and ere I was aware, some of the soldiery of the garrison, having espied me, loosed a firelock upon me. I heard the ball chirping like a bird over my head and brake upon the opposite wall just beyond me, whereby I was sufficiently affrighted and wanted to creep away from that dangerous place as unobservably as I could. Again in the year 1691, being a teacher in the Canongate School, and it being my turn to accompany the Marquis of Montrose, who was then a scholar in that school, home to his lodgings at the foot of the Canongate, the guard which was kept at the Canongate Tolbuith being ordered to ground their arms, in the grounding one of the pieces went off and the bullet singed my stocking and shot a boy who was on the other side of the street through the thigh. This was a very narrow miss to the Marquis likewise, who was next upon my right hand." And he records other "near misses" of a similar kind.

In the course of the same "Observes," Anderson is at pains to acquit himself of any tendency to superstition, and immediately proceeds to show by various illustrations how superstitious he really was. "I am conscious," he says, "that I am as little given to superstition as any man living, but ever since I began to reflect and make observes, I have

found that the itching of my right eyebrows has proved an indication to me that I was shortly to meet with or hear of something that would prove vexing to me." He had also a strong belief in dreams as warnings of trouble, in spite of his protests to the contrary. "I before God declare," he writes, "that though I have the least regard for dreams of any man living perhaps, yet I have been warned of all the signal steps of my life by them. Before I married, being then schoolmaster in Leith, I dreamed I was playing upon the sands of Leith nigh to the Beacon, and that ever I was aware I was surrounded by the sea, without all hopes of escaping, upon which methought I sat down at the foot of the beacon with the greatest patience and composure to attend my fate. My marriage has indeed been a sea of troubles to me. . . . Other dreams I had relating to the same subject which I have found fully verified, but which I will not put in writing."

Again he writes, "I hardly ever dreamed of Mr. James Lowry of Merchistoun that I have been singularly obliged to him, but troubles followed upon it ; nor have I ever dreamed that I was riding, or about to be hanged, as I have done several times, but troubles followed upon it."

In protesting his disbelief in dreams as shadows of coming events, it would seem that he doth protest too much ; and here is at least a curious coincidence which might well have confirmed him in his idea that there might be something in their messages after all. "November 13, 1715," he writes, "in my dream I saw the battle of Dumblain very lively represented, and as soon as I awoke I went in to William Campbell and told him and his lady that I had dreamed there had been a drawn battle betwixt Argyle and Mar. Against noon that same day, we got an express from Glasgow signifying that Argyle had obtained a compleat victory ; but by after accounts we found that it was indeed no other than a drawn battle." The battle of Dumblain, of course, is the battle between Hanoverians and Jacobites better known as Sheriffmuir, where

"Some say that we wan, and some say that they wan,
And some say that nane wan at a', man."

In dealing with Anderson's superstitions and dreams, however, we have got too far ahead of time, and must return to where we left him in his career, as one of the doctors in the High School. In 1696 there was a vacancy in the parish of Dumbarton, caused by the death of the minister, whose end was supposed to have been hastened by the malice of the Bargarran witches, who were afterwards executed at Paisley and who were said to have performed their revels in the manse garden. The vacancy had lasted some time when early in 1698 the Presbytery of Edinburgh was asked by the minister of Bonhill to send some probationers to preach

for some time in the church of Dumbarton. In reply he was asked to name any probationer within their bounds. He accordingly nominated Mr. Anderson, who by that time had passed through his Divinity course and received his license to preach : and the Presbytery permitted him to go to Dumbarton for two or three weeks, provided he could get permission from the Town Council to leave the School for the time, at the same time giving him an extract of his license and a Presbyterial Certificate. It will be remembered that Patronage had been abolished in 1690 and was not reimposed until 1712 ; and the appointment was in the hands of the heritors and elders, subject to the privilege of congregations to give in reasons of disapproval, if they so desired, to Presbyteries, by whom the final decision was made.

III

In response to the invitation he had received, Anderson went to Dumbarton, where he gave such satisfaction that he received a call to become minister, and was ordained by the Presbytery in September 1698 with fasting, prayer and laying on of hands.

One of his early duties was to instal a new schoolmaster—Mr. David McAlpine—in the parish school. There was evidently a religious service held and Anderson preached a sermon in which he set forth his views on the duties of teachers. “ The schoolmaster,” he says, “ must be of a pious and religious disposition—children walk by the eye more than reason—and therefore they had great need to have a good copy before them. A well qualified master must be a man of prudence and good common sense, which really is none of the commonest things in the world—an ounce of mother-wit, they say, is worth a pound of Clergy. A master must always suffer his passion to boil over before he begin his correction, and then it is best managed in cold blood. His chastisement must be such as may smart the boys but never hurt them, and therefore is to be inflicted on that part of the body which is furthest from both head and heart.”

Anderson was evidently regarded as an authority on education—and certainly his experience as a teacher justified his reputation—for some time later he was asked by the Synod for a report on schools and the manner of education therein. One thing he complains of is the “ type ” of the book from which they are taught. “ The first set to the child is to learn him to read his mother tongue ; and for this he goes through a course of Catechism, proverbs, psalm book, chapter-book as they call it, and Bible. As these are printed in a black dutch or gothic character, a kind of print he will seldom have to read afterwards, any other English book is an

unknown character to him." "Children," he says again, "are not taught to distinguish a word into syllables—this retards a child's progress when he comes to learn the latin tongue." And he urges that "no woman be allowed to teach, or at least none but those who are known to understand syllabication. They are generally under no favourable character for their skill in spelling."

During the next few years there is no record of his doings. He was, no doubt, fully occupied in the varied work of the ministry; but he found time apparently for other congenial tasks, as we gather from letters. Sir James Smollett of Bonhill, who was a staunch friend, placed his son Archie in Anderson's care during the College vacation, "Edinburgh being too full of divertisement for young men"; being determined that "unless he have gott a genius for learning and willingness to apply, he will be disposed of in other ways." Archie, however, responded to the tuition and oversight of the minister, who was able to report favourably of his progress. This Archie, it is interesting to note, was the future father of the novelist, Tobias Smollett.

In 1705 Anderson began to keep a diary; and though he continued it for only three months, the entries throw some light upon his habits and interests. Apart from references to his preaching and his difficulties in getting his teind from heritors who were slow to pay, they are interesting in showing how he found relaxation amid his work. There is no mention of Monday morning golf or Saturday afternoon football-matches, but there are references which show a keen interest in the game of draughts and in the then popular sport of cockfighting. "19th Jan. I went with Mr. McAlpine to Bonhill to see Mr. Bane, with whom and Mr. Menzies I diverted myself at the dams for a good part of the day. I was too light at my game." On 29th Jan., Monday, "After breakfast Mr. Gilchrist, minister of Luss came in, and I spent the whole day with him playing at dams." On 20th Feb. he writes, "This morning I rose before seven, exercised in the family, and at eight went to see the cocks fighting in the Tolbuith, and returned at twelve." It does seem strange that a minister after family prayers should betake himself to witness such a cruel form of entertainment as (to use the words of Andrew Fairservice) to see "a wheen middencocks pike ilk ithers harns oot." But other times, other manners.

His life in Dumbarton was not without adventures of a kind. On the 30th of January, having been at Bonhill overnight, he borrowed Mr. Bane's horse to come home, but, he says, "I was hardly well seated on him when he ran away with me; and after having sitten on him a while, for fear of greater hazard I threw myself off him and lighted on the breadth of my back, and found my back sore and my head confused with

the fall. I came home on foot. It was a singular providence I was not killed, for which I hope I shall not forget to bless God." All the same, the very next day he ventured to tempt providence again. "A horse having come in for me, I went for the Milltoun to the marriage of Umphrey and Marjory Colquhoun; but as I was riding a little be east the Mains, Robert Burnside met me driving his horse with a great pack and a blanket cast over it, at which the horse starting with a great deal of violence threw me off and ran straight home; but I received not the least hurt. God help me to be thankfull."

In the month of March that year he paid a visit to Glasgow evidently to purchase materials for a new outfit. "I bought cloath for a coat from Mr. Boyd, 3 quarter broad for five shillings an ell; bought a wig from Fullerton for eight pound and a groat to the boys; bought a hat from Mr. Christie for six shillings and lining for my coat for sixteen pence an ell . . . My landlord brought me in plush for breeches which I bought at five shillings per ell." The "cloath" was duly taken to Dumbarton and made up the next week by the local tailor. But wherefore all this fine array? He was going to the General Assembly.

The General Assembly of 1705 met in April, and Mr. Anderson, arrayed in his new wig, hat and coat, and in his plush breeches, set out for Edinburgh. It was a momentous point in his life, for he returned from it equipped and armed for the greatest controversy of his life.

IV

The use of the Lord's Prayer in public worship, which had been the practice in the Church after the Reformation, had fallen into abeyance for many years. In spite of the recommendation of the Westminster Directory, many ministers ceased to use it. In 1649 a member of Assembly desired that its use should be forbidden, and while the Assembly declined to go so far, it left it to individual ministers to use it or disuse it as they pleased. So except in Episcopal churches (and not always in these) began the long neglect of the Lord's Prayer which lasted generally throughout the church for more than 200 years; so that Dr. Robert Lee, that pioneer in the cause of a seemlier worship, could write in 1862 that "even at the present day there is a considerable number of churches in Scotland in which lessons from the Bible are not read nor the Lord's Prayer used."

The worship of the Church at the beginning of the 18th century had fallen into a very unworthy condition in many of the congregations. John Knox's Liturgy and the forms suggested in the Westminster Directory were alike forgotten; and every minister in the matter of

prayer did that which was right in his own eyes, with results which were often unfortunate and sometimes weird. Sir Hugh Campbell of Cawdor says of them : " Do not many of our young ministers stand in need of set forms (which I desire not to be imposed) both of preaching and prayer? Have I not heard some of them use expressions in prayer which no man could make sense of? Another using expressions which he himself understood not? Another praying in terms which none present understood more than if he had spoken Hebrew? A fourth in his prayer repeating the whole history of Jonah? Did not such stand in need, if not of other set forms, at least of the Lord's Prayer? "

There were, however, a few both ministers and laymen who desired a seemlier worship, and especially the restoration of the Lord's Prayer in the services of the Church; and of these Anderson was one. In 1704 Sir Hugh Campbell, who had been a kindly, if unobtrusive protector of covenanting ministers under the Episcopal regime, but who was not blind to their narrowness and bitterness when they returned to ascendancy in the Church, wrote an Essay on the Lord's Prayer which was printed and published in Edinburgh, in which he made a strong plea for the use of the Lord's Prayer in public worship. He sent a copy of his essay to William Carstares, who was then the wise and politic leader of the Church, and who was Moderator of the Assembly of 1705, requesting him to bring it before the Assembly. Carstares, however, knowing that this would be a bone of contention, did not bring it to the Assembly; but had an Act passed recommending the due observance of the Westminster Directory which says, " And because the prayer which Christ taught His disciples is not only a pattern of prayer, but in itself a most comprehensive prayer, we recommend it also to be used in the prayers of the Church."

Fortified with the passing of this Act of Assembly, John Anderson returned to Dumbarton, and on the first Sunday after his arrival he introduced the Lord's Prayer into his service, annexing it to the prayer after sermon. Thereafter he addressed the congregation on the subject giving reasons for its use and telling them of the Act which the Assembly had passed recommending obedience to the Directory, and quoting the passage from that document concerning the Lord's Prayer. Straightway the fat was in the fire. He was at once met with many objections. It was a new thing in their worship. It had been used in times of Prelacy and therefore was Prelatical. It was a step towards introducing the Doxology also. It was a form. It was not used in other Churches. The following Sunday he dealt with the objections which he had heard during the week, and reconciled a number of the objectors. But that Sunday, being the day of the Glasgow Communion, some of the Dumbarton people had gone to

the city, and returned saying that they had it from the ministers of Glasgow that no such thing was done at the Assembly as the recommending of the Directory. "Upon this," he says, "people were put into such a commotion that there was no ill name, which anger and indignation could suggest, but was very liberally bestowed upon me in their little private caballs; and people came running upon me quarrelling me for abusing them in an untruth, and telling me there was as much reason to believe the ministers of Glasgow as me." So matters remained for two or three weeks until by the occasion of a friend going to Edinburgh he was able to get a copy of the printed Acts of Assembly. These arriving opportunely on Saturday, the 9th of June at 10 o'clock at night, he took them with him to Church the following day and read the recommendation of the Directory to the people, thus establishing his veracity and confounding those who had put their faith in the Glasgow ministers. The controversy went on among the people for some time longer, but Anderson had an answer for all his critics and continued the practice he had begun. Even superstition had, however, been summoned to the aid of the malcontents before all was over, of which he tells an amusing tale. "There is a fenny marshy piece of ground, very full of reeds, about half a mile up the Levin river from the town. In the midst of all these heats there comes thither a fowl called a bittern . . . This fowl has a very curious uncouth sound, which we may express by bouncing or blouting, as when one puts one's fingers into an empty bottle and draws it out again hastily and with force . . . Those that first heard this fowl were mightily alarmed, and many of them affirmed it made the ground shake under them and the hair stand on their heads; whereupon they concluded it to be no less than the Devil. At length the report spread itself, and presently they applied it to the introduction of the Lord's Prayer, and doubted not but some mighty evil was portended thereby. At last James Houston, a gunsmith in the town, who was acquaint with that king of fowl and its sound, carries out his fowling-piece and shoots it dead; after which the uncouth sound was never heard, and the people with much ado were undeceived." And he naively adds: "The Lord's day following, there was none observed to separate from the worship but one."

His troubles, however, were by no means over. He had satisfied his congregation, but he had now to deal with his Presbytery. The Presbytery had appointed a visitation at Dumbarton, and at this meeting Anderson preached the sermon, and to the prayer after sermon he added the Lord's Prayer. A number of the members, indeed the majority, were much displeased with both; the Sermon, he says "having rubbed upon them." After the usual investigations into session, school, and other routine matters, the Moderator invited complaints against the minister; and

some of the elders complained of the Lord's Prayer. There was evidently much difference of opinion in the Presbytery and some strong language was used, "Several indecent expressions passed among them against one another." In the end, to make a long story short, a motion was carried disapproving the use of the Lord's Prayer and advising him to cease until the meeting of Synod. The Synod met in October, and despite the efforts made by the majority of the Presbytery to get that Court to forbid the use of the Lord's Prayer, refused to put its veto upon the practice. "By all their importunity," says Anderson, "they procured only that the Moderator only recommended us to keep uniformity, which vexed them extremely when I told them the meaning of that recommendation was that they should use the Lord's Prayer as I did."

Anderson would have liked also to introduce the reading of Scripture into the Service, also in accordance with the Directory, but partly owing to the state of his health at the time which made him unable for so much speaking, and partly owing to the troubles caused by the introduction of the Lord's Prayer, he did not venture to begin it, although he admits "There was more need of it than of the prayer, so many being unable to read."

V

In succeeding years Anderson took a prominent part in the ecclesiastical controversies of the time and published several reviews of the questions at issue. The well-known attack on Scottish Church worship entitled "Presbyterian Eloquence Displayed" brought him forth as the knight-errant of Presbytery, and in various pamphlets he carried the war into the enemy's country. To these Robert Cadell (or Calder), the former Curate of Nenthorn, made a violent reply in which he ventured on gratuitous and unseemly personalities. But Anderson was quite a match for him in strength and bitterness of language, and published a reply entitled "Curate Calder Whipt," which Wodrow thought unsuitable to his gravity; "although," he adds, "it may be, as he said to me when I challenged the Billingsgate style, this was the only way to silence Calder."

In 1714 Anderson published his best and most exhaustive work. It was entitled "A Defence of the Church Government, Faith, Worship, and Spirit of the Presbyterians," in answer to a book entitled "An Apology for Mr. Thomas Rhynd separating from the Presbyterian Party and embracing the Church of England." The book, dedicated to Archibald, Earl of Islay, Lord Justice General of Scotland, deals critically and in great detail with Rhynd's statements and arguments and over against them states and justifies the Presbyterian position. The chapter on

Church Government is the most thoroughly elaborated, occupying almost half of the book. So much was it approved for its defence of Presbytery that it was thought worthy of republication even more than a hundred years afterwards.

It was perhaps as a testimony to the ability of the author and to the reputation he had won that he was appointed to preach before the Lord High Commissioner at the next Assembly. On the 9th of May, 1715, Wodrow writes to his wife from the Assembly : " Yesterday Mr. Anderson of Dumbarton preached in the forenoon. He lectured upon Gal. vi, 1-5, and preached on verse 16th very clearly and distinctly " (" And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be unto them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God ").

VI

In virtue of his abilities and character Anderson had come to be regarded as a minister of considerable distinction in the Church : and when William Carstares died in 1715 leaving the Principalship of Edinburgh University vacant, some of his friends thought of the minister of Dumbarton as a suitable successor. It is not quite clear whether he wished this position himself ; but he certainly had a desire to obtain one of the Edinburgh charges about this time. But it was not to be. Very soon afterwards, however, the Town Council of Glasgow determined to erect a new charge in the city, and to call a minister who would not be in agreement with the other ministers, who were all suspected of being tainted with the heresies of Professor Simson, then Professor of Divinity.

Simson was charged with Arminianism before the Assembly of 1714, and his case dragged on for three years, the Assembly finally finding that he had used expressions capable of being misunderstood and prohibiting him from using them in future. It was a verdict of " not guilty, but don't do it again " ; but unfortunately he did not heed the warning, and a dozen years later he was suspended for life from preaching. It was, however, in the earlier days that the Glasgow ministers were suspected of being influenced by him ; and Anderson, whose orthodoxy was undoubted, was called to the new charge, generally known as the Ramshorn.

The city ministers, however, were bitterly opposed to his coming, and the Presbytery of Glasgow refused to sustain the call ; but the Synod, on appeal, reversed the decision ; and ultimately the call was sent to the Presbytery of Dumbarton. The Kirk Session of Dumbarton made a strong effort to retain their minister, and the Presbytery refused the

translation. In the end the matter was taken to the General Assembly of 1718, which ordered the translation to take place ; and Anderson left Dumbarton in August 1718. His church in Glasgow was completed two years later and dedicated by him at a public service.

He preserved many of the papers connected with the call, which his descendant has had typed—reasons for and against his translation, appeals and complaints, instruments and extracts ; but it were wearisome to go into detail. Unhappily the struggle wore him out, and the story of his brief ministry in Glasgow is a story of shattered health and broken spirit. He died in February, 1721. Wodrow says of him that “ he had been very much felled, stupid, and without his senses several days before his death. Had he continued where he was, his character had certainly been intire, but his coming to Glasgow was certainly a great loss to him, and his great abilities seemed to be very much lessened, if not blasted, by his coming to Glasgow ; and his gifts failed him, even his very memory.”

It was a sad and disappointing end to a worthy life and a promising career. He was only in his 51st year when he died—an age when his gifts had been matured and his abilities should have been at their best. In happier surroundings, free from suspicion and strife, he might have risen to higher things and given still better service to the Church ; but the spiritual atmosphere in Glasgow brought him defeat and failure. But in his day he had fought a good fight for his faith and for his Church. He had striven for a seemlier worship and a more reverent attitude to God. And we remember him as a man before his time, a voice crying in the wilderness, prophetic of better things to come.

